

Are Grapes the New Miracle Fat-Burning Food?

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Overview

It turns out that the common grape, loved by many for its natural sweetness, may have more to offer health seekers than its role as an easy everyday snack. No, it's not a new " Frankenfood," but rather a compound found in grapes may help the body burn fat, according to a study published in the January 2015 issue of the Journal of Nutritional Biochemistry.

Food Sources of Ellagic Acid

Blackberries (63 milligrams per cup)

Pomegranate juice (43 milligrams per 8 ounces)

Red raspberries (3 milligrams per cup)

Muscadine grape juice (2 milligrams per 8 ounces)

Walnuts (2 milligrams per ounce)



What the Research Says

The study pinpoints a phytochemical in muscadine grapes called ellagic acid as the key to reducing harmful belly and liver fat, which are the bellwethers for obesity, metabolic syndrome, heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. In a review of the science, the authors of this study noted that a daily intake of as little as 2.3 milligrams of ellagic acid per pound of body weight was associated with 25 percent less fat mass and better blood sugar metabolism. That translates to about 340 milligrams of ellagic acid per day for a 150-pound person.

How Many Grapes Would It Take?

In case you're wondering, you probably can't count on grapes alone to meet that level. Dietary sources of ellagic acid include fruits, vegetables and nuts, so a total-diet approach is the best way to increase overall ellagic acid intake. In addition, the study authors couldn't say if ellagic acid alone was responsible for the fat-burning benefits or if it was something about the complex matrix of nutrients intrinsic to whole foods. For these reasons and more, it's smart to seek out foods rather than supplements.

More Reasons to Love Grapes

Recent research on a related species, the California table grape, offers even more reasons to love grapes. Two studies presented at the 2015 Experimental Biology symposium found that grapes may promote optimal fat and glucose metabolism, which is important for the 35 percent of U.S. adults classified as prediabetic and at risk for developing Type 2 diabetes.

Some people think fruit and diabetes don't mix, but expert opinion differs: These findings support the American Diabetes Association's recommendation to enjoy fruit as a nutrient-packed carbohydrate choice within a healthful meal plan.

Ideas for Including Grapes in Your Diet

The simplest way to enjoy grapes is to give them a good rinse and pop them in your mouth, preferably when they're at peak season. California table grapes are in season May through January, and muscadine grapes are in season September to October.

In the warmer months, grapes straight from the freezer are not only cool and refreshing, they make a naturally healthy bite-size alternative to other frozen desserts. Additional ideas include enjoying grapes "on salads, as a snack or especially as an hors d'oeuvre," shares Marissa Beck, M.S., RD, Seattle-based registered dietitian working in corporate wellness and sports performance.

Bottom Line

The study on ellagic acid in grapes is the first of its kind to describe just how the compound may be responsible for burning fat. While promising, it still needs to be replicated. Until then, what we do know is that ellagic acid is found in naturally healthful foods that belong in a balanced diet with or without this new study. Even better, since grapes are a fruit, they're a healthy source of carbohydrates, says Beck. Best of all, grapes are a practical and affordable way to add good nutrition to snacks and meals for kids and adults alike.